Suit Seeks to Bar Watergate Hearings

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The National Citizens Committee for Fairness to the Presidency filed suit in U.S. District Court here yesterday in an attempt to halt public hearings by the Senate Watergate Committee.

The group said it was filing the suit on behalf of all of the citizens of the U.S. because the hearings "have deliberately and inequitably disrupted the domestic tranquility of the U.S. by undermining the confidence of citizens . . . in the integrity of the administration of the Department of Justice and the (nation's) judiciary."

According to papers filed with the suit, the hearings are often repetitive. Various members of the committee often ask the same question of the same witness, "often with considerable attendant theatrics, so the cost of obtaining information through public hearings is substantially greater than if it were gathered by staff interviews or in closed sessions," the fairness group said.

The group, which is headquartered in Rhode Island and claims 40,000 members, also strongly criticized the committee's method of operation.

For example, witnesses are allowed to make statements based on hearsay that allege criminal acts by others, but the person accused does not have a right to question the witness about such charges, the group said.

The senate hearings are scheduled to begin again Sept. 24. The fairness group asked for an expedited hearing on its suit.